

Session Four: Communications

(Source: Wangerin and Balswick)

Scriptures:

Gen 2:24-25

James 1:19-26; 3:1-12

Eph 4:1-3, 14b-16, 17-32

Prov 25:12;15:31; Ecc 5:1 cf. Dan 9:19

I Kings 3:1-15 cf. II Chron 1:7-13

Questions:

- How do/did your parents communicate with each other?
- How do you communicate with each other?
- What are the essential ingredients of effective, marriage-building communication?
- Do you consider yourself a talker or a listener?
- How do you consider your partner?

Introduction:

- Depth of substance and intensity of interchange is essential for healthy marriages. This takes place with alternate speaking and listening.
- The single most important ingredient for preserving and perfecting marriage is not communication but forgiveness. But there can be no genuine forgiveness without genuine communication.
- Marriage exists in relationship. A relationship is only healthy with the full participation of both partners.

Two problems that hinder health-giving interchange (dynamic dialogue):

(Wangerin, p. 151ff.)

1. Sin manifesting itself in the urge to talk and be heard and the frustration that others are not listening.
 - Couples blame each other for not listening and not talking simultaneously. This is done because they each make themselves the centre of the relationship and the god of the household, finding only faults and failures in the other.
2. Few people are born with the native ability to talk or listen well.
 - These are skills that must be learnt and relearnt continuously - cultivated and reinforced

Self-expression alone, is not dialogue

The talk of dialogue involves the work of knowing, acknowledging and shaping speech **towards** and **for** the other . . . Good talk is the giving of something: mind to mind, person to person, and as one loves the other, the loving helps the other to receive what is given. It is a careful process, exchanging the weight and the safekeeping of something significant from one to the other. (cf. Wangerin, p. 158)

Good Talking:

Good talking is within the reach of everyone.

The basic elements of effective conversation:

1. The listener
2. The speaker
3. The purpose of the conversation

Therefore . . .

1. Shape what you say and how you say it with the listener in mind. Let the listener be the focus of the talk. Let your entire being be involved in the message and remember that you are not just imparting information but constantly commenting on your relationship. Use sight, touch and sound to communicate.
 - **The eyes** should acknowledge, authenticate, honour and encourage, conveying that there is nothing hidden, shameful or forbidden between you. Be "naked without being ashamed." Convey transparency, vulnerability and authenticity.
 - **Touch** conveys that the talker and the listener exist and are there for each other and what sort of communication is intended. Marriage not only gives the right for the touch of intimacy, but pleads for it. Touch is a physical means of the talk itself. Touch means more than words. They reinforce, complement and authenticate the verbal and visual messages.
 - **Sound:** One of the most important sounds is the name of the spouse. When the name is mentioned with the proper tone, deep calls out to deep. The mention of the name is the most personal, most meaningful way of saying, "You."
 - By watching your spouse while you talk, touching and feeling him/her, observing their reactions to your talk, calling by name and inviting their presence into the dialogue, you have an effective way of communicating and measuring how efficiently your listener is responding.
2. Know clearly who you are and how you appear to your listener (you are the instrument that communicates. You are your communication).
 - There must be congruence between thoughts, drama, posture and tone.
 - Shape the message according to the spouse's perception and needs.
 - To talk well, listen well. Let your spouse act as mirror to you.

3. Know the actual purpose of the conversation.
 - Say what you mean and mean what you say.
 - Determine who is meant to benefit from the conversation.
 - State your purpose.
 - Many talks are futile; because the talker fails to know his/her purpose or fail to state it.
 - Watch your motives.
 - When purposes and motives are not clear or at cross-purpose, multiple conversations are going on simultaneously. This hinders effective and efficient communication.

Good marriage talks, have clear purposes and serve the marriage. Not all talks need to have profound purposes. The marriage is served often by talking for talk sake. Such talks keep the channels of communication clean and clear. Casual conversation maintains and nurtures the relationship and keeps it from starving and at the same time keeps it vital and vibrant.

Good Listening:

- Wisdom is the ability to listen. It is the opening of one's heart for talk, for the presence of another.
- Listening is an active labour, a learned skill, not a passive silence.
- False listening is waiting *for* the other to finish; good listening is waiting *on* the other while he /she speaks. Listening must be learned and relearned constantly.
- Listening requires the sacrifice of self-denial. Always talking, never listening, is blatant self-assertion.
- True listening lays oneself aside for a while.
- Listening is more than giving attention; it is giving of life as well, so that the speech truly lives for both.

Three Things about Good (Active) Listening:

1. It shows listening

- Do this by a look, a nod, murmur, a smile.
- Body language is eloquent
- Active listening encourages others to talk
- A talking-listening marriage organizes itself

2 We need to empty our hearts in order to listen:

- Don't listen to your image of the person; listen to the person. We often imprison our spouses in our image of them. Active listening breaks open this prison.
- Don't problem-solve before you get all the facts
- Assume nothing.
- Empty self of prejudices and preconceived ideas

- Emptying oneself is humility
 - Listening is essential for forgiveness
- 3. Practice listening by cultivating the fruit of the Spirit:**
- Listening is an opportunity for loving
 - *Unselfish love* gives the other person the "spot light". It is dialogue that defers to the other
 - *Joy* comes from receiving the speaker's, talk, thoughts and life
 - *Peace*: health and wholeness/oneness come to a marriage as one spouse affirms the other through listening
 - *Patience* grants the person the time and the attention necessary
 - *Kindness* is uncritical and un-interrupting
 - *Goodness* recognizes, acknowledges and appreciates the person's contribution, whether great or small
 - *Faithfulness* assures the other that you are always there
 - *Gentleness* is necessary because self is fragile and self-revelation makes us vulnerable
 - *Self-control* is necessary for us, not only to wait our turn, but to earn the right to speak
 - God wants to help us cultivate these fruit(s) in our lives and marriages.
 - Without good talking and listening, clarity and comprehension are unattainable

Achieving Intimacy (Expressing Love): The Communication of Intimacy

(Source: Balswick, p, 199ff.)

(This portion can easily fit into a section that deals with sexual intimacy. It is included here since communication and intimacy are connected.)

- Expressing love is crucial if intimacy is to be achieved.
- Modern society increases loneliness and alienation through mechanization, anonymity and bureaucratization. People are often lonely in a crowd.
- People desire intimacy because much of life is impersonal.
- Genesis 2:24-25 is the biblical ideal for intimacy.

Three reasons love is essential and beneficial:

1. It benefits the person who makes the gesture.
 - It is unhealthy to keep one's feelings bottled up within oneself. This applies to both good and bad feelings.
2. It affirms the person that is loved.
 - Aids self-worth, self-image and self-esteem
3. It is important to the relationship.

- The relationship is established, maintained and enhanced by intimacy.

There need to be both verbal and nonverbal expressions of love. Nonverbal messages are ambiguous but are essential to clarify and reinforce verbal messages. Communication must be characterized by preciseness and “personalness”.

Obstacles to expressing love:

1. Fear
 - Fear of vulnerability, rejection, being ignored, unacknowledged or unrequited
2. Low self-esteem
 - Inability to love one self often results in the inability to love others
3. The potential for embarrassment
 - Talking about intimate matters
4. The amount of time that is required to express love (it takes time to build relationships)
 - It requires both quality and quantity time
5. Not being in touch with one-s own feelings
6. Traditional and cultural expectations
 - Socialization and false signals, usually from parents, peers and the media.

Three things that may work against the expression of love:

1. There is no reciprocation to the expression of love.
2. There are factors of inequality and vulnerability
 - Without mutual sharing between partners, there can be no real intimacy.
3. The birth of a child
 - Sometimes bring an additional emotional burden

Truthfulness and Dependability (Trust) and Sharing of Labour.

(Source: Wangerin)

Three things that are related:

1. Speaking the truth in love
2. Acting (living) the truth in love
3. Labouring at the task in love

These three are important for identity, security and continuity in a world of uncertainty, distrust and disruption. Trust sustains love and the relationship when, there are no evidences of either.

Speaking the Truth in Love (Truthfulness):

Truthfulness has to do with your speech toward your spouse.

- It hides nothing in lying.
- It neglects nothing important.
- It distorts nothing consciously or unconsciously.
- It communicates clearly regardless of what the subject is: self, world or spouse, etc.
- It considers what is said, as well as how it is said.
- It uses lips, heart and eyes in the process.
- It is free from deception because it realizes lies kill relationships.
- It carefully examines self and distinguishes experiences, feelings and observations.
- It is honest about relations and shares in making decisions.

Living the Truth in Love (Dependability):

Dependability has to do with truthfulness in actions.

- It makes promises wisely, realistically and according to its abilities and the needs of the partner.
- It remembers promises and duties.
- It makes the promise a fixed priority.
- It accomplishes all its pledges ungrudgingly and gracefully.
- It realizes that the purpose of a promise is to assure stability, in spite of uncertainty.
- It makes the future certain and reliable.

Truthfulness in action is the life or the death to the relationship. Dependability is personal and spiritual labour. Promises shape future activities and schedule priorities and work. Dependability often has to sacrifice opportunities to keep its promises. It declines certain personal advantages and in so doing inspires trust in the beloved.

Dependability proves truthfulness, and truthfulness builds trust. Truthfulness assures the other of his/her identity. Truthfulness and trust grant the beloved a mirror of self. Trust resists suspicion. It is the marital protection against crisis. However, it cannot be suddenly created in crisis. It must be there before crisis strikes. Trust is currency in the relationship's bank account. It is drawn from in times of crisis. It is built incrementally but is often destroyed instantly.

Labouring in Love (Sharing of Labour):

Sharing is not:

- Procreation or love for the same child
- Occupying the same space
- One spouse duplicating the other

Sharing is the participating in, the sustaining and strengthening of the third entity of the marriage triangle - the relationship. It attended to what is essential for the survival of the relationship.

Building a marriage is work - hard, steady and serious work.

It is:

- Sharing a life.
- Sharing a love.
- Sharing a labour.

Four things about sharing in this Labour of Love:

1. The sharing of the work must be willing, conscious and mutual.
 - Tasks are divided in a conscious harmonious discussion between the spouses.
 - Each spouse chooses his/her duties and acknowledges and executes the responsibilities for these duties.
 - Each participates fully in the process and respects the other.
2. The sharing of work is according to natural differences of the spouses.
 - Marriage is a union of differences - talents, abilities, gifts, likes, desires, etc.
 - Differences must be recognised, acknowledged and celebrated.
 - Celebrating is done by assigning and accepting work that one is best suited for.
 - Sharing focuses on both *being* and *doing*.
3. The sharing shows a continual, sincere interest in the other person's work.
 - It shares in the trials, the triumphs, the failures and the successes
4. The sharing realizes that all work, ultimately serves the marriage
 - Any job undertaken and performed by anyone is justified on the basis of the ultimate goal
 - The final purpose shapes our attitudes and behaviour toward the work.
 - Sharing comes from faithfulness that begins with a vow/covenant.

- The focus of all work is the healthy survival of the household.
- Sharing the work of survival means offering all of one's work in the service of the marriage. It is the embodiment of humility, sincerity and intensity. This type of sharing resists any type of temptation toward independence, toward personal liberty, toward *doing one's own thing.*^o It realizes that interdependence and mutuality are the signs of unity and road toward maturity; and that independence and secrecy implies a life divided from one's spouse. These often lead to atrophy and the eventual death of a relationship.